

D.A.D.D. Doctor Assisted Death with Dignity

Norman Goldstein MD

The December 1996 Special Issue on Death and Dying (aka Death with Dignity) has already created a great deal of interest, as we expected. I sent a copy of this issue to each Executive Director or President of the 50 State Medical Societies, as well as Guam and the Virgin Islands, and other associations around the world.

Next month, we will reprint the speech presented to the National Press Club of Australia by the Honorable Marshall Perron, former Chief Minister of the Australian Parliament, on this important subject. Look for the special issue on Death and Dying-Part II in March.

Facts

1. In the 1996 Gallup poll, 75% of Americans surveyed said they would like to see a law permitting Physician Aid-in-Suffering for those rational terminally ill patients who request it.
2. In 1995 and 1996 surveys, more than 50% of physicians in Washington, Colorado, Oregon and Michigan believe it should be legal for physicians to help rational, suffering, terminally ill patients die who request it to die with dignity.
3. A majority of the more than 5 million voters in Oregon, California and Michigan passed a law permitting Physician Aid-in-Dying, which in actuality is a law protecting physicians who choose to aid the suffering, terminally ill, rational patient.

Despite the fact that the American Medical Association has officially taken an opposing position to Physician Aid-in-Suffering of the terminally ill patient, many rank-and-file physicians in Hawaii and across the country are in favor of assisting their patients to die, and have done so and will do so—though unfortunately they will not and cannot declare their position for legal reasons—at this time.

Hemlock Hawaii has a one-hour video tape of Geoffrey Fieger, Esp., attorney for Dr Jack Kevorkian, speaking at the Hemlock Conference in Denver, November 1996. It is a powerful tape, humorous, poignant and compassionate, showing that this is a patient's choice—yours and mine, and should not be governed by law. Every physician and attorney, medical and law school should have a copy of this tape; it is available by sending \$15.00 to Hemlock Hawaii, P.O. Box 1423, Kailua, HI 96734.

Mahalo to the Hawaii Medical Library and Drs Ann Catts and Drake Will

As regular readers of the Journal know, the December issue contains a very extensive index for the year. The Editorial Board and staff really appreciate the efforts of the reference librarians at the HML for an excellent index—by subject and author.

Thanks also to the Library staff for the many

computer searches conducted for the edition and our authors. The Library also sponsors programs to educate physicians and health providers on the World Wide Web/cyberspace.

Mahalo to Dr Ann Catts and the Library for the exhibit on Death with Dignity, pro and con. It was certainly very well done.

Many thanks to Dr Ann Catts and Dr Drake Will for helping to edit the Journal. Pathologists never truly retire—we keep them too busy to retire. Mahalo Ann and Drake!

The Hawaii Coalition for Health

Did you miss the commentary in last month's Journal by Arlene Meyers MD (aka Arlene Jouxson) entitled "The Words of Hippocrates!"? Arlene, now a second-year law student at the University of Hawaii School of Law, started this Coalition last month.

The highest priority for 1997 will be "the standard medical practice"/"medical necessity" to serve as a resource for the public to substantiate information about their health plan, and to seek assistance in cases where payment for care has been wrongfully refused.

You can join the Coalition. Call Arlene at (808) 622-2655 or fax her at (808) 622-5599.

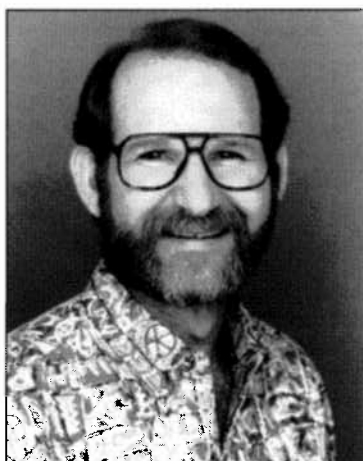
Letter to the Editor

Chicken Skin Time

**Eleanor "Andi" van der Voort RN
President of Hemlock Hawaii**

Bundled in a lined London Fog Coat, woolen underwear and mittens, I arrive in Denver for the Ninth National Conference of the Hemlock Society featuring the topic "Death is Not the Enemy, Suffering Is." Not only the 70 degree temperature, but the people taking part in this educational and positive conference melted my heart. We worked our way through the many Anti-choice protester poster holders outside the hotel and even accepted them within the lecture rooms with their lap top computers. We were offered from morning to eve, dedicated, tireless workers testifying as to their progress in most of the 50 states represented, as far away as Alaska and Hawaii. Several legislators, many physicians and attorneys as well as the person on the street, from all walks of life, race, sex, age

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and religion were present with one common goal: to assure that everyone in a terminal or incurable state, has the choice to do what they wish, at the end of their lives, in order to die with their loved ones, without suffering, with the help of a prescription of medication from a physician. At the last national polling, at least 74% of our citizens agree that this is our right. Legislation should not be needed but the Anti-choice people and some intolerant religions with large bank rolls and some of the AMA want to take this right away from us through legislation and we are being forced to fight back. Medicine has changed in the last 30 years: with the advent of sophisticated machines and medications, persons who would have died peacefully in prior years are now artificially forced to linger in a sometimes painful and cruel dying process.

This is not everyone's wish—*certainly not mine*.

Highlights of the conference was the talk, followed by questions and answers by Mr Geoffrey Feiger, the attorney for Dr Jack Kevorkian. His main message was "They" are trying to take away our right to die when and how we want. "They" would love to talk about this for the next 100 years. "They" will try to bankrupt us. "They" will do everything in their power to enforce their views on us - *we must fight this intrusion into our lives*. The video of Geoffrey Feiger, Esq. is available through the Hemlock Hawaii Chapter, which is listed in the Honolulu telephone directory.

Editor's Note:

Andi van der Voort RN was born and educated in Canada, and received postgraduate training in psychology in Costa Mesa, California. She has worked at Queen's, Castle, and St. Francis Medical Centers. Though officially semi-retired, she now serves as president of Kaneohe Bay Toastmasters, Humanists Hawaii, and Hemlock Hawaii. She is far from retired! Mrs. van der Voort and her husband of 38 years live in Lanikai. She is a frequent speaker representing Hemlock Hawaii at civic and educational meetings. Recently, she served on a University of Hawaii panel on Death with Dignity on the Big Island. This tape is currently aired on Olelo TV.

President's Message


John S. Spangler MD

This is the month for legislative action and many bills including medical ones will be debated and hopefully HMA will help with this as we have done in the past. We tend to complain about the government but we need to support the process and hope to make it better.

Also February is love month with Valentine's Day. You need to express your love this month!

**Tired of
throwing
your weight
around?**

**American Heart
Association**
Fighting Heart Disease
and Stroke



Exercise.

Special Commentary

W. Mitchell Sams, Jr. MD
President, American Academy of Dermatology

Dermatology World (AAD) Vol #10
October 1996

An Open Letter to My Son

Dear Hunter:

Now that you have completed the first three years of medical school and are increasingly excited about patient contacts and your future role as a physician, I'd like to take this opportunity to pass on to you some thoughts that I have developed over many years of practice and that, if followed, are certain to make your own professional life more rewarding and your patients more satisfied.

- Don't forget to smile as you enter the patient's room. Such a simple gesture is terribly important and puts the patient immediately at ease.
- Remember that a patient often is frightened and lonely. Take the time and expend the effort to sit down with that patient, relax and just talk and listen, rather than standing as though you are in a hurry to leave the room.
- Write your notes about the patient and your prescription in the patient's room. It is much more meaningful to them and permits you to spend more time with the patient. They may think of other questions important to them when you are relaxed.
- Touch the patient, even if just lightly on the arm. This shows you are not afraid of catching whatever they have (whether skin disease or not), but also conveys concern and understanding. It can be a magnificently important gesture.
- Learn some "nonessential" information about the patient, such as hobbies, recent trips, children's achievements and ambitions. Then make a note of this in the chart and bring up the subject again on the next visit. You will be amazed at how impressed the patient is with your "memory" for these events.
- It is o.k. to express confidence in helping the patient that may not be totally justified by the options. The patient's confidence in you and in the real possibility of improving his or her condition can enhance the healing process.
- At the same time, tell the truth. If the disease is not curable (such as psoriasis or atopic dermatitis), say so, but quickly add that it can be controlled with appropriate therapy. I liken psoriasis to arthritis or diabetes; neither are curable but both are usually controllable. Patients seem to understand and accept that better.
- If you are running behind schedule, apologize to the patient as you enter the room. It puts them off guard if they were planning to complain and lets them know you are aware that their time is also important.
- Express your appreciation often and sincerely to the people who help you be what you are—your colleagues, your nurses, your residents, your receptionists. You will not be a success without them. Be sure you let them know that.

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